DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 136 PS 027 857

TITLE	A Different World: Media Images of Race and Class. Annual Children and the Media Conference Report (5th, Stanford, California, May 6-8, 1998).
INSTITUTION	Children Now, Oakland, CA.
PUB DATE	1998-08-00
NOTE	17p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescent Attitudes; Adolescents; Audience Response; Childhood Attitudes; *Children; *Cultural Images; Ethnicity; Mass Media; *Mass Media Effects; Mass Media Role; Minority Groups; *Race; *Socioeconomic Status; Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

Children Now, with the UCLA Center for Communication Policy and Stanford University, hosted the fifth annual Children and the Media Conference. The conference focused on the intersections among race, class, children, and the media. This report highlights the thinking of participating executives, producers, writers, advocates, academics, and children, and parallels the conference structure. Each of five panels is featured; brief "panel perspectives" precede a sampling of quotes, insights, and suggestions from moderators, panelists, keynote speakers, and young people. Snapshots of research data commissioned by Children Now are included along with recommendations for future action. The five panels are: (1) "Black, White and Rich All Over? Messages Entertainment Television Sends Children"; (2) "True Stories: Television, Reality, and Children's Beliefs"; (3) "From the Newsroom to the Living Room: How Media Influence Public Policies Concerning Children"; (4) "Shaping Our Children's Future: The Power and Potential of Media"; and (5) "I'm Still Looking for Me: The Voices of Young People." (EV)

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ED 433 136

Fifth Annual Children and the Media Conference

A iff ren World

media images of race and class

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I watching TV.
I believe what I see.
I'm still looking
for

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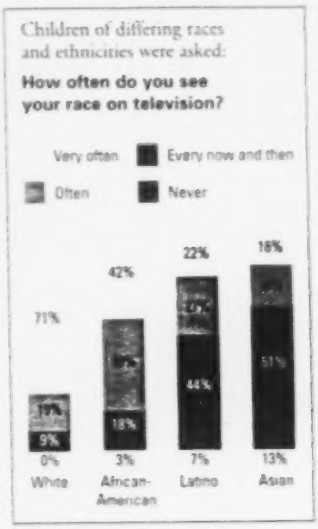
CHILDREN NOW

LOS ANGELES TIMES EDITORIAL

MONDAY, MAY 11, 1998

The Power of TV Images

Asian and Latino children, even as their numbers in the population grow, rarely see themselves on television. At an impressionable age, when they are forming positive or negative self-images, they are often left out of the picture altogether. When they are included, they may be portrayed as nonessential or stereotypical. White children nearly always see themselves, and black children increasingly see people 'who look like them,' though often in unflattering portrayals. These are the findings of "A Different World: Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in the Media," a study conducted on behalf of Children Now, the Oakland-based advocacy group.



These results should challenge broadcast executives to play fair on the air. Though why should they, when basically all-white shows like "Seinfeld" and "Friends" top the ratings? The answer is in demographics. Entertainment executives who know anything about U.S. population estimates realize that before too long, Latinos will constitute 25% of the national market; Asians remain the fastest-growing minority. They are viewers of the future, the customers sponsors will covet.

All children are sensitive to what they watch on television, whether the programming is news or entertainment. They draw conclusions. They believe, said the study, that white characters are more likely to be rich, smart and successful. They are leaders, doctors, police officers–never maids or janitors. Minority characters are more likely to be poor, lazy, criminal or goofy. Asian characters are often unnoticed. These early impressions matter. Children quickly pick up stereotypes and inequities; they all recognize the real role models.

In his 1947 landmark study, Kenneth Clark, a psychologist at the City University of New York, and his wife Mamie asked black and white children ages 3 to 7 to choose among four dolls, two black and two white. Though the test subjects were split 50-50, two-thirds of the children preferred white dolls. The Clarks concluded from their study of doll preferences that segregation–which at that time included a complete absence of positive black images in the mass media–produced harmful psychological effects in black children. The U.S. Supreme Court cited this influential research in its 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education desegregation decision. Even when the same test was repeated 10 years ago, the results were the same.

Today, if put to a similar test, which doll would Latino and Asian children choose? Broadcasters ought to worry about the answer.

August, 1998

Dear Friends,

In May, Children Now, with the UCLA Center for Communication Policy and Stanford University, hosted the fifth annual Children and the Media Conference—*A Different World: Media Images of Race and Class.*

Recognizing the important backdrop of our nation's growing diversity, this year's conference explored sensitive territory. Media messages about race and class are communicated overtly, subtly, and persistently and the impact is far-reaching, especially for our nation's children. While issues of race and class have been addressed previously in a variety of forums, this conference broke new ground. It focused on the intersections among race, class, children and the media, and it ensured that children themselves were heard. To gauge their perceptions, Children Now commissioned a national poll and series of focus groups. The remarkable results of this research were announced at the conference.

The report which follows parallels the conference structure. Each of five panels is featured, reflecting the rich content and lively dialogues that they generated. Brief "panel perspectives" precede a sampling of quotes, insights, and suggestions from moderators, panelists, keynote speakers, and young people. Snapshots of the research data are included along with recommendations for future action.

Without change, the stakes are high indeed. High for our children. High for those who care for and about them. And high for our nation. "Our majority population, to the extent that it still exists," noted Meryl Marshall, President of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, "is failing to become competitive in the world environment because it does not understand nor appreciate difference." Whether influencing the national economy or our local communities, failure to deal with difference affects each of us. This conference clearly identified the problem. By mirroring our nation's remarkable diversity, the media has the unique capacity to participate in the solution.

We hope that you find this report valuable and that you will share it with your colleagues as you plan and implement your work.

Donald Kennedy
Chairman of the Board

Lois Salisbury
President

A 1998 national poll of children conducted by Children Now found that 82% of African Americans, 79% of Asians, 78% of Latinos,

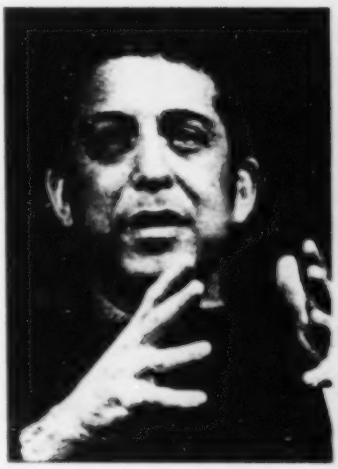
Black, White & Rich All Over?

Messages Entertainment Television Sends Children

Keynote: "As I address these problems on behalf of the industry, what we find ourselves doing is becoming slightly patronizing. We take on a good cause or respond to the statistics that are brought to us as opposed to accepting the fact that our majority population (to the extent that it still exists) is failing to become competitive in the world environment because it does not understand or appreciate difference."

Meryl Marshall
President, Academy of Television Arts & Sciences

Panel Perspective Children are deeply influenced by images and messages about race and class on entertainment television. Research shows that television characters are overwhelmingly middle class. Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans are virtually invisible, and sitcoms are segregated by race. Such programming mirrors the interests, experiences, and perceptions of executives, writers, and decision-makers within the industry, but does not reflect the racial and economic make-up of America nor the perceptions of kids. As the country grows increasingly diverse and as the media itself diversifies, change is essential. ●



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"I was struck when I came down here this morning that I've never been downtown. I live in Studio City. I live in my world, and then I go to my job, and then I write about my world. I don't think we have global perspective."

David Simon, Writer/Producer
Mad About You and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*

Student Panelist

"A lot of Latino kids look up to Black or White people because that's the only thing they see on TV. There are no Latino people for them to look up to."

Victor Luna, age 14

d 67% of Whites think it is *'very important'* or *'somewhat important'* for children to see people of their race in the media.

"I was just in Korea, and it was such a profound experience for me to be surrounded by people who looked like me and then to turn on the TV and watch sitcoms and soap operas with all Korean people."
Steven Park, Actor, *In Living Color* and *Fargo*

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"We have programs designed for children, but children look at television (like it or not, ready or not) at all hours of the day and night. [And] the more that children live in the world of television, the more they believe that television happens to be the way the world is."
Dr. Gordon L. Berry, Professor
UCLA School of Education

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"I constantly face this attitude that Black people must behave differently than White people...that all the cultures have to behave like 'themselves' and that people can't just behave like people."
Maya Williams, Writer/Producer
The Wayans Bros. and *Roc*

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"People who are in those positions generally reflect the dominant culture. It's only been about 20 years really that anybody has stood up and said, 'We want to see more people of color on TV.' The response is like a turtle going up a hill, but there has been a response over the last 20 years."
Maria Perez-Brown, Producer, Nickelodeon

Moderator: "The average person taking a walk in Los Angeles or throughout California is seeing a lot more Latinos and Asian people than they see on the tube."
Chuck D.
Special Correspondent
FOX News

What's Next

Conduct Further Research

Continue to examine the impact on children of media portrayals of race and class in relation to America's growing diversity.

commission and support innovative programming research, such as studies on the influence of media images on children's future aspirations, self esteem, and academic achievement

expand upon 1998 research data to include Native Americans and other under-represented ethnic groups

examine current ratings systems within the context of increasing media diversification

identify and bring attention to industry "success stories" to generate awareness of responsible, as well as profitable, programming in both news and entertainment

A 1994 Children Now poll found that 50% of children reported feeling angry, afraid, sad or depressed after watching the news.

True Stories

Television, Reality, and Children's Beliefs

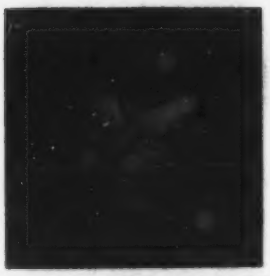
Keynote: "An historic shift has taken place in who is telling all the stories. It used to be parents, church, community. [Today, the media] are telling the stories and it affects everything that we think and everything that we do. This market-driven cultural environment has a profound effect on children, on parents, on everyone."
Dr. George Gerbner
Professor, Temple University

Panel Perspective Reality-based programs and talk shows, steeped in adult content, are among children's favorites. However, these shows blur the lines between news and entertainment. Many kids also watch the nightly news, and even those who do not are exposed to its content through promos and early-hour local newscasts. The emphasis on crime and crisis in these programs and the preponderance of racial and class stereotypes have a profound and often disturbing effect on children.●

Student Panelists

"I think the news should be there to tell you what's going on that needs to be said, but I think it shouldn't just harp on the bad. They should look for positive things."
Nubia Andrade
age 16

"When I watch the local news it's more like bad news, so I want them to have a mixture of good and bad. Watching all those violent scenes on the news makes me think, 'Oh man, the world is like that. Oh my God, I'm going to be the next victim.'"
Nina Ryu
age 18



Moderator: "It's absolute denial to think that children aren't watching these shows; they prefer these shows. They're watching the news, and they're watching talk shows. Even though you might not be trying to attract them, you know they're there."

Margaret Carlson
Columnist, *Time* Magazine

"If you're on [shows like] *COPS*, you're a stereotype. Whether you're a White working-class person, a Black working-class person or from any other group, you're already stereotyped. You are, therefore, not us."

Alan Snitow
Producer, KTVU-TV News

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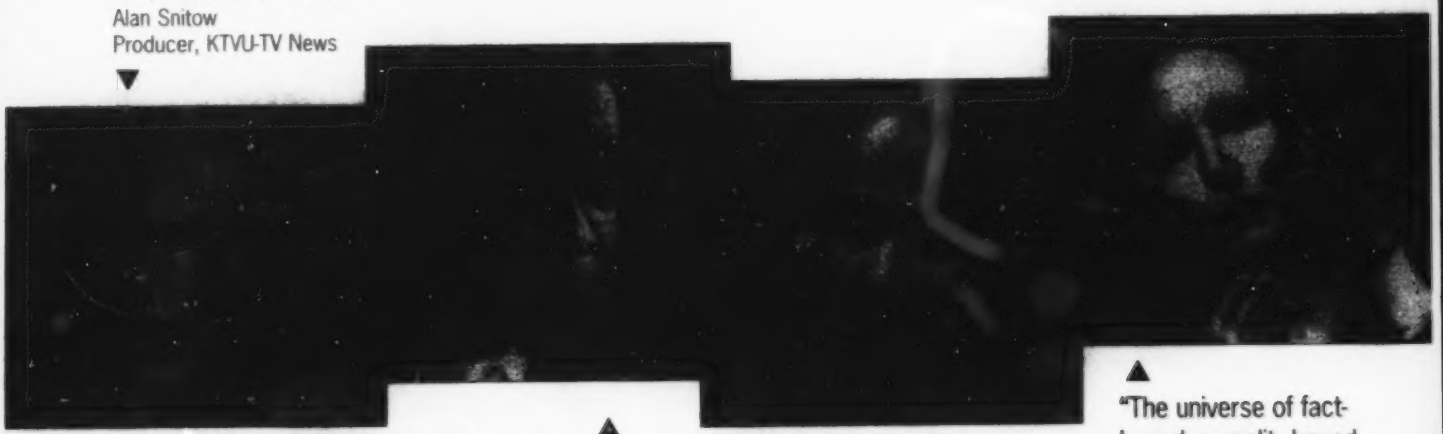

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"One of the problems is that TV reporting (particularly in the local news) doesn't talk about white-collar crime, but primarily focuses on street crime. When you start doing that, you're dealing with poor people and, in most urban centers, they're going to be Black and Latino. This is very damaging and painful and depressing to Latino and African-American youth, in particular."

Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint
Director, Media Center
Judge Baker Children's Center

What's Next

Develop Rainbow Resources

Enhance sensitivity and knowledge about issues of diversity among journalists, editors, writers, producers, and executives by providing on-line assistance.

- create listings of research findings to provide a reliable source of up-to-date information
- provide links to relevant organizations, such as La Raza, Media Action for Asian Americans, and The Casey Foundation, to broaden the available resources and ensure that they are easy to access through a centralized clearinghouse
- establish a "rolodex" of ethnically diverse consultants drawn from industry, academia, and advocacy who have expertise and experience with a wide range of issues

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"We are advocates of kids. They are our life blood and we are their network, for the most part. But there is a dividing line between the entertainment business and the 'bringing up your children' business."

Todd Cunningham
Vice President, Research & Development, MTV

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"The universe of fact-based or reality-based programming is so vast now that the network evening news shows and the network prime-time shows are but a small part of the total constellation."

Jennifer Siebens
Bureau Chief, CBS News

From the Newsroom to the Living Room

How Media Influence Public Policies Concerning Children

Keynote: "We must ask ourselves if the media's treatment of race is doing the job when it comes to discussing the complexity of racial issues, or is it creating more misunderstanding by turning complex issues of race into questions with yes and no answers."

Judith Winston
Executive Director, President's Initiative on Race

Panel Perspective Public policy in this media age is tied to media coverage. In the news media, children—especially minority teenagers—are most likely to be seen in stories of crime and violence. At the same time, little attention is paid to the 1 in 5 of our nation's children living in poverty. The policy consequences are significant, especially in the areas of welfare, crime, and education. Public judgments, which drive these policies, are strongly influenced by news coverage, particularly of individual incidents or events. The media should provide a broader picture.●

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"Believe it or not, we do have doctors and lawyers and engineers and astronauts. Those people come in all different colors and we try to show that. That's how we change public policy, by giving you another vision to look at. Same story—the faces just change."

Deborah Tang
Vice President, News, Sports & Entertainment, BET

Student Panelist

"I live in the Crenshaw area, and on the news there's always something going on. But the neighborhood is not that bad. I don't think we're being portrayed the way we are. A lot of times the news portrays it like we're getting into trouble or we have plans to go rob someone's house. The news doesn't go to the schools in the area and see if the students are going to college or if students are doing something with their lives."

Alicia Rhymes
age 18

"As long as we continue this overemphasis on youth problems and creating youth as the image of everything that's gone wrong in society, then we are perpetuating a subtext of racism because the younger generation, at least in this transition period, is much more non-White than the older generation."

Michael Males
Author, *Scapegoat Generation*

"Youth and violence have been connected on local television news. They come together to be almost the same thing, which is the most serious problem for the people who have the least actual personal contact with young people."

Dr. Frank Gilliam
Professor of Public Policy, UCLA

"One of the things that journalists do is ask questions. So are they asking the right questions? And are they asking the questions that are going to point the camera not only to the victim, but to the *landscape?*"

Dr. Lori Dorfman
Co-Director, Berkeley Media Studies Group

"What do we do with a crime story, the part of the story that helps set an agenda for a discussion of public policy? We do it by commission, but we also do it by omission. The failure to have certain kinds of issues or certain kinds of people represented in the coverage affects the public agenda, affects the formulation of public policy and awareness on the part of the public."

Raul Ramirez
News Director, KQED

What's Next

Inspire Movers and Shakers

Identify and engage individuals and groups with media leverage who are most likely to take action on behalf of all children.

- reach out with special attention to industry leaders who are parents
- build coalitions with professional associations such as the Screen Actors Guild, National Association of Black Journalists, Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, as well as with academics and advocates to find common ground and develop action plans
- disseminate information to reporters, editors, and producers about important issues affecting children, such as poverty, educational opportunities, and access to healthcare

Moderator: "When we look at how the media treats children, we have literally made them into a horror movie...made them into criminals, violent people, gangsters. And I think this can especially be said about minority children."

Juan Williams
Columnist, *Washington Post*

Shaping Our Children's Future

The Power and Potential of Media

Keynote: "Television is a very powerful medium and [because] it attacks the subconscious mind, we should try desperately hard to use it correctly."
Edward James Olmos
Actor, Director, Producer

Panel Perspective The media will continue to play a major role in shaping the attitudes of our nation's children. Their power to inform and enlighten—as well as entertain—is demonstrated by programs as diverse as *Sesame Street, Star Trek, Roots, Cinderella,* and *ER.* What do these highly successful shows have in common? They communicate shared human qualities and experiences. They present a broad range of characterizations. And they avoid racial stereotypes. What will it take to encourage the development of more programs such as these? ●

"Asian Americans are usually just guest stars on someone else's show. We just want to be ourselves, part of the mix on an ongoing basis."
Guy Aoki
Founder, Media Action Network for Asian Americans

"It's not hard. The first thought I give every script that I look at is, 'Can we break some stereotypes with this?'"
Michael Loman
Executive Producer, *Sesame Street*

"If a Latino show gets on the air, it cannot possibly represent the 20+ million Latinos. But if our population is going to be at least 25%, eventually there's going to be a Latino sitcom."
Josefina Lopez
Playwright, Television Writer

their race are important," (84%) ..."it makes children of that race feel included," (81%) and..."it provides role models" (78%).

Moderator: "The media have the capacity to help us learn to talk about race, not to bury it, not to keep it taboo."
Lois Salisbury
President, Children Now

Student Panelists

"When I do see Latinos come out in shows, they usually come out as gangsters, as being bad people. They never show us as being good people, like going to school, graduating, and having a good career. I would like to see more of that."
Regina Chiche
age 15

"I think TV makes stereotypes of people, like it's okay to only have friends of your own race. Especially the high school type of shows. They make kids think, 'That's how all the Whites are.' 'That's how all the Blacks are.'"
Michael Medoway
age 14

"I think we have a competitive edge over the other music magazines out there because our staff is very multicultural. It's not always fun, but I think it makes for a better magazine. We have enough people on our staff to reflect the balance of what's going on in the world today."
Danyel Smith
Editor-in-Chief, *Vibe* Magazine

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"I think children respond more to truth than they do to a kind of fabricated image of niceness. A child reflects onto the screen and takes back a vision of his better self, characteristics such as courage and humor. Our humanity is our common currency."
Ed Solomon
Screenwriter, *Men in Black*

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What's Next

Deliver Targeted Messages

Employ creative communications techniques to attract the interest and attention of key decision-makers.

- produce a video documentary on the impact on children of media images of race and class
- hold foundation briefings to present research, stimulating awareness and interest in the philanthropic community
- devote future issues of Children Now's newsletter for advertising executives, *Media Now*, to issues of race and class
- seek opportunities to share information at industry conferences and other gatherings of media professionals

I'm Still Looking for Me

The Voices of Young People

Keynote: "The optimism that we find among young people to me is just mind blowing. It's hard to believe, given what the young are up against. They must have sources of resiliency that I don't understand. I would have thought they would be much more cynical. I would have thought they would be much more disillusioned given what they're bombarded with day in and day out."

Dr. Cornel West
Professor, Harvard University

Panel Perspective Young people of all races overwhelmingly believe in the media's potential to deliver the message that people of their race are important. At the same time, they find striking inequities in both the quantity and quality of today's media portrayals of race and class. They are looking for TV that reflects their own lives and validates their own experiences with friends of different races. ●

▲ "I think that people look up to role models on TV because they are supposedly the best, or their character is the best. They're going to aspire to be that, to be as cool as that guy, or just to be like that person."

Charles Floyd
age 18

▲ "In Santa Barbara, once a month they used to show kids and other people doing stuff in our community. I thought that was really good—not to have just negative, but to have something positive."

LeAnna Perez
age 17

What's Next

Play Matchmaker

Connect the media with children of all races and classes to enable them to be heard in entertainment and news programming.

- link school, community, youth, and other reliable organizations with the media to facilitate and broaden their outreach
- promote the inclusion of a diverse representation of children in industry programming research by holding specialized briefings

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"It would be nice once in a while to have a positive person to look up to — a Black person or a White person. It doesn't really matter what race they are."
Janisa Zacarias
age 16

▲
"When you see cops being interviewed, you only see White cops. You never see like Latino cops or Black cops or Asian cops, just White."
Sergio Bautista
age 13

▲
"I usually see the White people being the good guys and the heroes and the African Americans and the Latinos being like the criminals and jumping the border and robbing and stuff. I don't really like that because there are a lot of White people that are criminals too, so why don't they show that on the news?"
Becca Johns
age 12

Conclusion

Credits: *Writer:* Joan Lapp; *Editor:* Adam Tucker; *Editorial Assistance:* Perry Chen, Eileen Espejo, Adrienne Haufler, Katie Krey, Patti Miller, Demetrio Roldan, Lois Salisbury, Lisa White; *Design:* Dennis Johnson Design; *Photography:* Steve Fisch.

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This report reflects the thinking of the executives, producers, writers, advocates, academics, and children who participated in Children Now's conference. The concerns and conclusions they expressed require us to pay serious attention to the impact on children of media images of race and class. The conference opened the conversation. What lies ahead is the determination to incorporate what was learned into tomorrow's media messages. It can be done. It begins with the willingness of the media-makers to look beyond the neighborhood or board room for inspiration. It ends when the audience, in all its diversity, is reflected with dignity. And it matters. In the words of Dr. Cornel West, "Our market-driven industries are shaping the hearts and minds and souls of each and every one of us, but especially young people, who look for sources within the mass media that enable them to become mature, to become human."

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1998 Conference Schedule

Wednesday, May 6

Keynote: Edward James Olmos, Actor, Director and Producer

Thursday, May 7

Media, Race and Kids – Groundbreaking New Research
Dr. George Gerbner, Temple University
Celinda Lake, Lake Sosin Snell Perry and Associates
Jewel Love, Motivational Educational Entertainment

Black, White and Rich All Over? Messages Entertainment Television Sends Children
Moderator: Chuck D., Special Correspondent, Fox News
Panelists: Dr. Gordon Berry, Professor, UCLA School of Education
Maria Perez-Brown, Producer, Nickelodeon
Donna Brown Guillaume, Producer, *Fairy Tales for Every Child*
Steve Park, Actor, *In Living Color* and *Fargo*
Stephen Reddicliffe, Editor-In-Chief, *TV Guide*
David Simon, Writer/Producer, *Mad About You* and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*
Maiya Williams, Writer/Producer, *The Wayans Bros.* and *Roc*

True Stories: Television, Reality and Children's Beliefs
Moderator: Margaret Carlson, Columnist, *Time* Magazine
Panelists: Todd Cunningham, V.P., Research & Development, MTV
Judy Muller, Correspondent, ABC News
Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint, Director, Media Center, Judge Baker Children's Center
Jennifer Siebens, Bureau Chief, CBS News
Alan Snitow, Producer, KTVU-TV News
Kevin Spicer, Director, Broadcast Standards, Fox Broadcasting

Keynote: Dr. Cornel West, Professor, Harvard University
Dr. Sylvia A. Hewlett, President, National Parenting Association

From the Newsroom to the Living Room: How Media Influence Public Policies Concerning Children
Moderator: Juan Williams, Columnist, *Washington Post*
Panelists: Dr. Lori Dorfman, Co-Dir., Berkeley Media Studies Group
Dr. Frank Gilliam, UCLA, Public Policy Department
Sandy Gleysteen, Producer, *NBC Dateline*
Michael Males, Author, *Scapegoat Generation*
Raul Ramirez, News Director, KQED
Deborah Tang, V.P., News, Sports & Entertainment, BET

Remarks: Meryl Marshall, President, Academy of Television Arts & Sciences

Friday, May 8

Remarks: Judith Winston, Executive Director, President's Initiative on Race

Shaping Our Children's Future: The Power and Potential of Media
Moderator: Lois Salisbury, President, Children Now
Panelists: Guy Aoki, Founder, Media Action for Asian Americans
Michael Loman, Executive Producer, *Sesame Street*
Josefina Lopez, Playwright, Television Writer
Brian O'Neal, V.P., Children's Programming, CBS
Dale Pollock, Producer, *Set it Off*
Danyel Smith, Editor-in-Chief, *Vibe* Magazine
Ed Solomon, Screenwriter, *Men in Black*
Judith Winston, Executive Director, President's Initiative on Race

I'm Still Looking for Me: The Voices of Young People
Panelists: Young people from Los Angeles County

Next Steps: Brainstorm Among All Conference Participants

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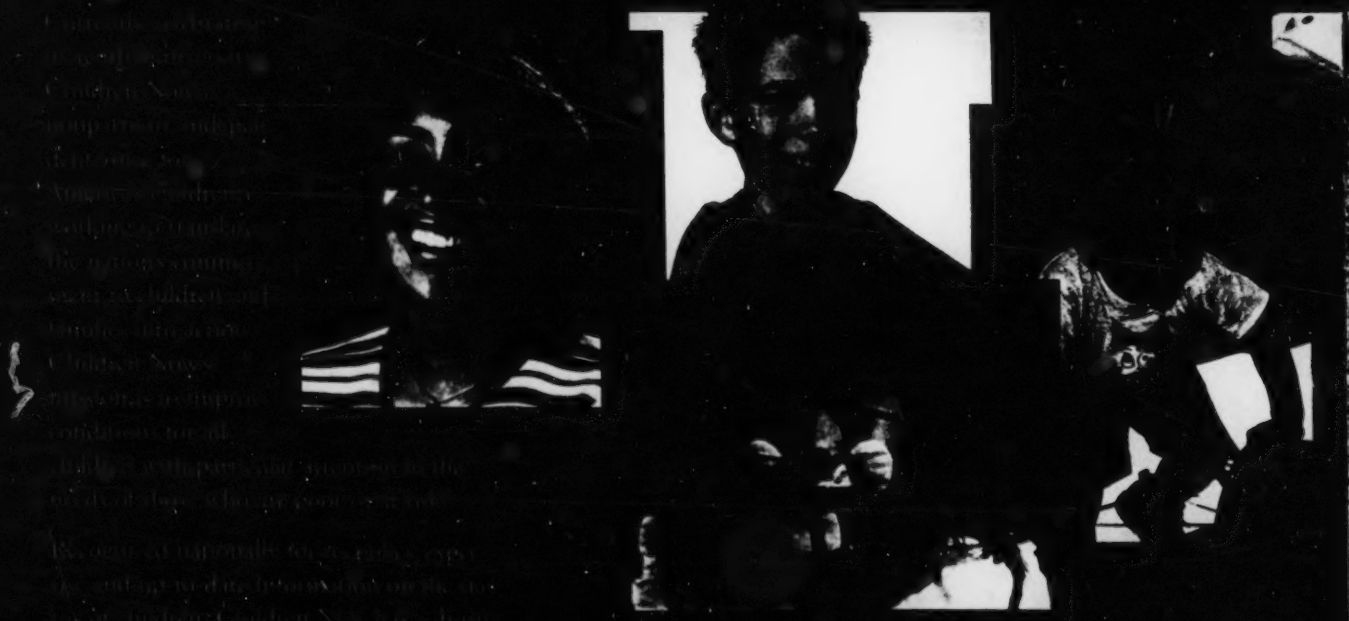
Acknowledgement to Funders
This report is a product of the Children & the Media Program at Children Now. Children Now would like to thank an anonymous funder, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, Gap, Inc., the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, the Levi Strauss Foundation, the Morrison & Foerster Foundation, and Rockerfeller Foundation for their generous support of the program. Library space was donated by the Joseph Drown Foundation and an anonymous funder. These donors are not responsible for the statements or views expressed in this report.



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